

1921 Alabama Centennial Half Dollar



Alabama half dollar 'Plain.' On December 23, 1921 the mint struck 54,030 plain coins. Reserved pieces included 28 for Annual Assay and 2 for Special Assay. 5,000 returned to the Mint for melting. Designed and modeled by Laura Gardin Fraser and distributed by the Alabama Centennial Commission. A coin I used to own. Mark Goodman photographer.



Alabama half dollar "2X2". On October 22, 1921 the mint struck 6006 "2X2" coins. Six pieces reserved for assay. On December 22, 1921 the mint struck 10,008 more "2X2" coins. Six pieces reserved for annual assay and two for special assay. A coin I used to own. Image courtesy of Pinnacle Rarities.

Approved by Congress on May 10, 1920 and issued to commemorate the one hundredth anniversary of the admission of the State of Alabama into the Union.

Design:

Obverse: Depicts two Alabama governors: Wyatt Bibb (1819) and Thomas Kilby (1919). The 2x2 and 22 stars reflect Alabama as the 22nd State in the Union, the X between the 22 refers to the red St. Andrew's cross on the state flag. Saint Andrew was the patron saint of Scotland. UNITED STATES OF AMERICA is seen on the top, with IN GOD WE TRUST below. HALF DOLLAR is seen on the bottom. BIBB – KILBY is seen above.

Reverse: Depicts an eagle perched on a horizontal shield with arrows in its talons and a ribbon in its beak. The ribbon states the motto 'HERE WE REST'. At the top is STATE OF ALABAMA with the dates 1819 and 1919 on either side of CENTENNIAL. This is from the state seal.



Governor Wyatt Bibb



Governor Thomas Kilby

**AUTHORIZING COINAGE OF MEMORIAL 50-CENT PIECE FOR THE STATE
OF ALABAMA**

**AUTHORIZING COINAGE OF MEMORIAL 50-CENT PIECE FOR THREE HUN-
DRETH ANNIVERSARY OF LANDING OF THE PILGRIMS**

REDUCTION OF THE WEIGHTS OF SUBSIDIARY SILVER COINAGE

HEARINGS

P104-18

BEFORE

THE COMMITTEE ON COINAGE, WEIGHTS, AND MEASURES

OF THE

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SIXTY-SIXTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

ON

H. R. 12824

**A BILL TO AUTHORIZE THE COINAGE OF 50-CENT PIECES IN
COMMEMORATION OF THE ONE HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE ADMISSION OF THE STATE OF ALABAMA
INTO THE UNION**

H. R. 13227

**A BILL TO AUTHORIZE THE COINAGE OF 50-CENT PIECES IN
COMMEMORATION OF THE THREE HUNDREDTH ANNI-
VERSARY OF THE LANDING OF THE PILGRIMS**

H. R. 10969

**A BILL FOR THE REDUCTION OF THE WEIGHT OF
SUBSIDIARY SILVER COINAGE**

FRIDAY, MARCH 26, 1920

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1920

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COMMITTEE ON COINAGE, WEIGHTS, AND MEASURES.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

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LOUIS B. GOODALL, Maine.
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WILLIAM L. NELSON, Missouri.
DANIEL F. MINAHAN, New Jersey.
SAMUEL M. BRINSON, North Carolina.
CLAY STONE BRIGGS, Texas.
HUGH S. HERSMAN, California.
L. B. RAINEY, Alabama.

D. STEWART PATTERSON, Clerk.

MEMORIAL COINS AND REDUCTION OF WEIGHTS OF SUBSIDIARY SILVER COINAGE.

COMMITTEE ON COINAGE, WEIGHTS, AND MEASURES,
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
Friday, March 26, 1920.

The committee this day met, Hon. Albert H. Vestal (chairman) presiding.

The CHAIRMAN. The committee will come to order. Mr. Rainey desires to be heard this morning on H. R. 12824, which reads as follows:

[H. R. 12824, Sixty-sixth Congress, second session.]

A BILL To authorize the coinage of 25-cent pieces in commemoration of the one hundredth anniversary of the admission of the State of Alabama into the Union.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That as soon as practicable, and in commemoration of the one hundredth anniversary of the admission of the State of Alabama into the Union as a State, there shall be coined at the mints of the United States silver 25-cent pieces to the number of one hundred thousand, such 25-cent pieces to be of the standard troy weight, composition, diameter, device, and design as shall be fixed by the Director of the Mint, with the approval of the Secretary of the Treasury, and said 25-cent pieces shall be legal tender in any payment to the amount of their face value.

SEC. 2. That all laws now in force relating to the subsidiary silver coins of the United States and the coining or striking of the same, regulating and guarding the process of coinage, providing for the purchase of material, and for the transportation, distribution, and redemption of the coins, for the prevention of debasement or counterfeiting, for security of the coin, or for any other purpose, whether said laws are penal or otherwise, shall, so far as applicable, apply to the coinage herein authorized: *Provided*, That the Government shall not be subject to the expense of making the necessary dies and other preparations for this coinage.

**STATEMENT OF HON. L. B. RAINEY, A REPRESENTATIVE IN
CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF ALABAMA.**

Mr. RAINEY. Mr. Chairman, this bill is to commemorate the one hundredth anniversary of the admission of the State of Alabama into the Union. Alabama was admitted on December 4, 1819. The State will very gladly bear whatever expense is necessary in the way of dies for coinage of the 25-cent pieces. The bill calls for 100,000 25-cent pieces to be coined in commemoration of the anniversary, the one hundredth, of the admission into the Union of our State. The only criticism that I have heard at all in the State is this, one of the daily papers thought that we ought to have asked for 200,000 instead of 100,000. Mr. Chairman, I do not know that anything else could be said in regard to the bill.

Mr. ASHBROOK. I am in favor of the bill. I would inquire why you ask for 25-cent pieces instead of 50-cent pieces? Other States have been asking for the 50-cent piece.

Mr. RAINEY. It will make no difference with me. I was using the words 25-cent piece.

Mr. ASHBROOK. The bill specifies that.

Mr. RAINEY. It is not that I think Alabama is any cheaper than Maine. Maine asked for the 50-cent piece.

Mr. KELLER. Probably all could not have the 50-cent piece.

Mr. ASHBROOK. There is no reason why they could not.

Mr. RAINEY. As far as I am concerned, the coinage of the 50-cent piece will be all right. Perhaps it will be better.

The CHAIRMAN. I understand that all expense attached to the coinage of this coin will be borne by the State?

Mr. RAINEY. Yes, sir.

Mr. BRIGGS. That is section 2:

Provided, That the Government shall not be subject to the expense of making the necessary dies and other preparations for this coinage.

Mr. ASHBROOK. That is the actual proviso.

Mr. RAINEY. The State is perfectly willing to bear the expense. The governor has already written a letter.

The CHAIRMAN. Are there any other questions any member desires to ask Mr. Rainey?

Mr. RAINEY. I would not mind having that changed to 200,000 50-cent pieces in the bill. I believe it would be more satisfactory to our State.

Mr. BRIGGS. I am perfectly willing, Mr. Rainey, to accede to whatever your State wants in this matter. It is paying the bills.

The CHAIRMAN. The committee is not objecting to the size of the coin if you would rather have the 50-cent piece.

Mr. RAINEY. I believe I would, Mr. Chairman, and with the permission of the committee I will make that change in the bill, 200,000 50-cent pieces instead of 100,000 25-cent pieces.

Mr. ASHBROOK. I am quite willing it should be amended to the 50-cent coins, and I do not know that I would object to 200,000 of

them, although that is a larger number than has been coined and you might not dispose of the 200,000 as regularly as you anticipate now. Of course, I know it is a regular coin that will pass current. In the other States we have only authorized 100,000.

The CHAIRMAN. I think that is correct.

Mr. BRIGGS. That is all they asked for.

Mr. RAINEY. The only alteration I will ask is that it be made 50-cent pieces instead of 25-cent pieces.

Mr. ASHBROOK. Very well. I move then that the bill be so amended, to strike out "25-cent" and substitute "50-cent" coin and that it be reported favorably. (The motion was unanimously adopted).

(Thereupon, the committee proceeded to the consideration of other business).

66TH CONGRESS : : : 2D SESSION

DECEMBER 1, 1919—JUNE 5, 1920

COINAGE OF 25-CENT PIECES IN COMMEMORATION OF ADMISSION OF STATE OF ALABAMA INTO THE UNION.

MARCH 27, 1920.—Referred to the House Calendar and ordered to be printed.

Mr. VESTAL, from the Committee on Coinage, Weights, and Measures,
submitted the following

REPORT.

[To accompany H. R. 12824.]

The Committee on Coinage, Weights, and Measures, to which was referred a bill (H. R. 12824) to authorize the coinage of 25-cent pieces in commemoration of the one hundredth anniversary of the admission of the State of Alabama into the Union, having fully considered the same, reports as follows:

The Committee on Coinage, Weights, and Measures, to which was referred a bill (H. R. 12824) to authorize the coinage of 25-cent pieces in commemoration of the one hundredth anniversary of the admission of the State of Alabama into the Union, having fully considered the same, reports as follows:

The committee favorably reported said bill with the following amendments thereto:

In the caption of the bill strike out "25" and insert in lieu thereof "50."

In line 6 of said bill strike out "25" and insert in lieu thereof "50."

In line 7 strike out "25" and insert in lieu thereof "50."

In line 10 strike out "25" and insert in lieu thereof "50."

This bill follows the language of Public Act No. 163, Sixty-fifth Congress, being a bill to authorize the coinage of 50-cent pieces in commemoration of the one hundredth anniversary of the admission of the State of Illinois into the Union. No objection is made to the enactment of this legislation by the Secretary of the Treasury or the Director of the Mint, as set out in letter of March 16, 1920, from the Secretary of the Treasury addressed to the chairman of the Committee on Coinage, Weights, and Measures, which reads as follows:

In regard to the coinage of the 50-cent piece and the 25-cent piece I beg to say that while the department has no specific recommendation to make, no objection would be interposed should the Congress see fit to authorize the issue of such memorial pieces.

Very truly, yours,

D. F. HOUSTON, *Secretary.*

The rights of the Government are fully protected and it is free from any expense incident to the proposed coinage. The proposed coins will contain the same amount of silver as the current half dollar, and will be legal tender for their face value.

The committee believes this to be a suitable and desirable way of recognizing an important historical event, and unanimously recommends the passage of the bill.

"To Alabama Governor Thomas Kilby from Marie Bankhead Owen, Chairman of the Alabama Centennial Committee dated June 1, 1920, regarding the design used for the Alabama Commemorative Half Dollar with the State Capitol building on the obverse.

As Chairman of the Committee appointed by you to select a design for the Alabama Centennial coin to be minted by the Government in celebration of our 100th anniversary of Statehood, I be (*sic*) to report as follows:

After careful consideration of the various drawings and suggestions forwarded to your office and delivered to the Department of Archives and History pending examination by the judges, we find that none of the designs submitted were in our judgment desirable for the purpose designated. Each of the designs held merit, but according to the opinion of the judges no one of them was of sufficient quality from the standpoint of our history to warrant acceptance. Failing to find in the designs submitted what we felt to be an adequate presentation; your judges have prepared a design for the Centennial half dollar piece as follows:

Obverse: a cut of the State Capitol occupying practically the whole of the center of the coin. The cut to show building crowing 'Capitol Hill.' The steps leading up from Dexter Avenue in right foreground.

The three words 'State of Alabama' just under the upper rim. The word 'OF' set just above the Dome of the building. An appropriate sized star at both right and left of building.

The word 'Centennial' in the shape of a crescent showing under the view of the cut and next to the two dates '1819-1919.' These two dates to be in the same sized type as those used in 'State of Alabama.' 'Centennial' should be in small type, if desired, to properly show off this line.

In the design the State Flag should fly from the Dome, it consisting of a St. Andrews Cross, in red, on a square white field.

Reverse: 'United States of America' and 'Half Dollar' in same type to show immediately under and immediately above the outer rim of the coin. 'In God We Trust' to show, in small type immediately under the inscription 'United States of America' on the upper edge of the coin.

The full center of the coin to be adorned with a bust profile of Monroe and Wilson, Presidents at the time of the admission of Alabama into the Union and at the time of the celebration of the one hundredth Anniversary. 'Monroe' in small type and 'Wilson' in a like sized type, to show immediately back of, and immediately in front of, respectively, the two faces.

The date of coinage to be approximately put on this side of coin.

Two relatively sized stars to show on this face opposite those on other face of coin.

Accompanying the foregoing description, I hand you herewith a drawing made for us by Mr. Frank Spangler, Cartoonist of the Montgomery Advertiser, the work of which he has presented with his compliments.

We realize of course, that the design we have selected will serve merely as a suggestion to the Engravers of the Mint, and that based upon our ideas a more artistic coin will be produced than is indicated in the hasty sketch by Mr. Spangler.

Serving with me upon the Centennial Coin Committee were Dr. Charles Stakely and Capt. Wm. T. Sheehan, whom you appointed for that duty. The report I had (*sic*) you herewith is a unanimous agreement of the Committee for whom I am authorized to speak."¹



Rough sketches furnished by the Alabama Centennial Committee. Taxay p. 45.

¹ *The Authoritative Reference on Commemorative Coins 1892-1954*, Kevin Flynn, published by Kyle Vick, 2008, p. 253-254.



Mrs. Marie Bankhead Owen, Chairwoman of the Alabama Centennial Commission. Courtesy Encyclopedia of Alabama.

The designs for the coin were submitted by Mrs. Marie Bankhead Owen, Chairwoman of The Alabama Centennial Commission, and the sculpting of the models by Laura Gardin Fraser. Models by Laura G. Fraser whose signature L.G.F. is to be found in field near eagle on the reverse. Number coined – 54,038, melted – 5,000, distributed – 49,038. Coins sold for \$1 each.

The portrait of Governor Kilby on this piece has caused much comment. It was the first instance of the portrayal of a living person on a coin of our country, and has served as a precedent for several later issues. It seems indeed strange that this signal honor was not first accorded to a President or some other personage of greater significance in American history than a state Governor.

Since the time of Washington, the portrayal of living persons upon coinage of the United States had been avoided. During the 1860's and 70's, the portraits of living Government officials did appear upon the United States notes and fractional currency, but owing to unsympathetic public reaction, it was considered advisable to abandon the practice. Coolidge, Glass and Robinson, respectively, later were accorded the honor of having their own portraits upon the United States coinage. Although there have been four exceptions to this unwritten law, there is general opposition to the procedure.

"Inquiry at the office of the Secretary of State for Alabama has brought a reply that the Alabama Centennial souvenir half dollars will not be ready for distribution until about the first of next year. They will sell for \$1 each. This issue is similar in all respects to the issue for Maine, illustrated last month."²

"The outlook for the early appearance of the Alabama Centennial Half Dollar is not very promising. It will be remembered that three bills were passed by Congress last spring providing for the striking of commemorative half dollars for the Maine Centennial, the Pilgrim Tercentenary and the Alabama Centennial. The two former have already been issued.

Inquiries early in January regarding the Alabama coin were addressed to officials of that State, which brought forth the following information that the coins were not ready for distribution. Late in January we were advised that 'The Alabama Centennial Half Dollar, authorized by Congress, has not been minted. No provision for the payment of the cost attached to the making of the dies has been authorized.'

One of the provisions of the bill authorizing this coinage was 'that the Government shall not be subject to the expense of making the necessary dies and other preparations for this coinage,' which was also a provision of the bills authorizing the Maine and Pilgrim issues, as well as the Illinois Half Dollar a few years ago.

Considerably more than a year has now elapsed since the actual date of the centennial of Alabama's admission to the Union, which the coin is intended to commemorate-December 4, 1819.

We have no information as to the source from which funds are to come for preparing the dies, etc., for this issue. Perhaps the State Legislature is relied on to appropriate the amount. But it is almost inconceivable that, authority having been granted by Congress for such an issue, the State of Alabama will not speedily find some way to take advantage of the opportunity to have its name connected with the national coinage and to be as progressive as the States of Illinois, Maine and Massachusetts."³

² *The Numismatist*, The Alabama Centennial Souvenir Half Dollars, November, 1920, p. 509.

³ *The Numismatist*, Editorial Comment-Numismatic News, The Alabama Centennial Half Dollar, March 1921, p. 94-95.

"From the Commission of Fine Arts

Recommendations as to proposed model, 07/26/21. Approval of model on 09/22/21.

Minutes of meeting of The Commission of Fine Arts held at the office of Henry Bacon, 101 Park Avenue, New York City, Tuesday, July 16, 1921.

A committee meeting of the Commission of Fine Arts was held at the office of Henry Bacon, 101 Park Avenue, New York City, Tuesday, July 26, 1921.

The following members were present:

Mr. Moore, Chairman;
Mr. Fraser;
Mr. Bacon;
Mr. Ayres;
Mr. Mowbray;

also Mr. H. P. Caemmerer, Assistant to the Secretary, who served as secretary of the meeting in absence of Lieut. Colonel C. O. Sherrill, Secretary and Executive Officer.

The meeting was called to order at 10:00 a.m. . .

ALABAMA CENTENNIAL COIN: Mr. Moore brought to the attention of the committee a letter which he had received under the date of July 15, 1921 from Hon. L. B. Rainey, of Alabama, transmitting a copy of a letter from Mrs. Mary B. Owen, of the Alabama Centennial Commission, Montgomery, Alabama, advising that the Commission, with the approval of the Governor, had decided that the Alabama Centennial Coin should be minted in accordance with the Act of Congress approved May 10, 1920. The Alabama Commission, however, suggested a change in the obverse of the model, which had been made under Mr. Fraser's direction to the effect that instead of the heads of Monroe and Wilson those of Governor Bibbs (Governor at the time Alabama was admitted to the union) and Governor Kilby (the present incumbent) be shown. A few other changes were to be made in the obverse as in the arrangement of stars and the lettering. The Alabama Centennial Commission gave authority for proceeding in the work with the understanding that the model and dies would not cost more than \$800.00, the estimate heretofore specified for such work. Mr. Fraser was agreeable to this, and the committee endorsed the changes suggested in the design. . .

To the Secretary of the Commission of Fine Arts H.R. Caemmerer from James Fraser dated September 21, 1921 regarding having the first five thousand Alabama Commemorative coins struck with a special mark to help sales.

It occurs to me that information should be given to the Alabama Commission in charge of the Centennial fifty-cent piece as to the way in which the Missouri Centennial coin was marked with a special mark, and five thousand struck and sold at a premium. This might aid them in carrying out their project for the coin.

I should think that all states, wishing to do a Centennial coin, ought to have this information. The coin is practically complete, and photos of it will be sent shortly.

Minutes of meeting of The Commission of Fine Arts held in Washington, D. C., September 22 and 23, 1921.

The first meeting of the Commission of Fine Arts during the fiscal year 1922 was held in its office at 1729 New York Avenue, northwest, Washington, D. C., Thursday, September 22 and Friday, September 23, 1921.

The following members were present:

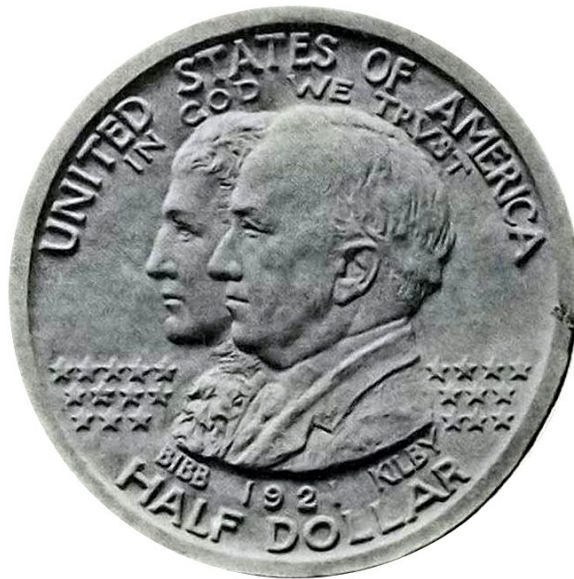
Mr. Moore, Chairman;
Mr. Pope;
Mr. Greenleaf;

Mr. Fraser;
Mr. Mowbray;

Also Lieut. Colonel C. O. Sherrill, Secretary and Executive Officer.

The meeting was called to order at 9:30 a.m. . .

ALABAMA CENTENNIAL COIN: Mr. Fraser submitted completed models for the Alabama Centennial Coin made by Mrs. Fraser. The Commission approved the models and recommended that they be forwarded to the Treasury Department for the approval of the Director of the Mint and the Secretary of the Treasury. The coin will be minted in accordance with the Act approved May 10, 1920. The Commission thought the models very fine and beautiful. . .



Laura Gardin Fraser obverse model (Taxay, p.45).



Laura Gardin Fraser original reverse model (CFA).

"After considerable delay the Alabama Centennial Half Dollar is now being distributed. The report of the coinage at the mint for October showed that 6,000 of the coins were struck during the month. There will apparently be two varieties of the issue, the first 5,000 having a St. Andrews Cross between two figure '2s' in small incuse characters on the obverse, which will be omitted on the balance of the 100,000 pieces. This feature of two varieties is also the case of the Missouri Centennial Half Dollar.

The Alabama Half Dollar is a very attractive coin, and we regret that a specimen was not received in time to illustrate it in this month's issue. The following description and details of the issue have been furnished by Mrs. Marie B. Owen, secretary of the Alabama Centennial commission, which has in charge the distribution of the coin.

The Alabama Centennial Half Dollar, commemorating the anniversary of Alabama's admission to the Federal Union as the twenty-second State, was placed on sale in Birmingham, in this State, on the morning of the visit of President Warren G. Harding to that city, on October 26.

The issue is in the same class of memorial coins as that of Illinois, Maine, and Missouri.

The State was admitted December 14, 1819, and since 1919 the people of that State have been commemorating the 100 years of its existence in sundry ways. The act of Congress authorizing the issue provides for 100,000 coins. They are being sold by the banks of the State, each and every one having agreed to dispose of its pro rata share according to its capital. They are sold for \$1.00 and registered postage, the premium being placed to the credit of the Alabama Centennial Commission, whose headquarters are at the Capitol in Montgomery. Mrs. Marie B. Owen is Secretary of the Commission. The premium will be used for historical and monumental purposes.

The coin shows on the obverse the profile of Hon. William W. Bibb, Governor in 1819, when Alabama was admitted, and of Hon. Thomas E. Kilby, Governor in 1919, when the State rounded out its 100 years of history. The 22 stars on the obverse designate it as the twenty-second State to enter the Union. 'United States of America' appears around the upper-edge of the coin. 'In God We Trust' is immediately under this. At the bottom of the coin is the date of issue, '1921,' between the words 'Bibb' and 'Kilby.' 'Half Dollar' appears at the lower edge.

The reverse shows the coat of arms of the State, which is the eagle holding in its claws a bunch of arrows and standing on a shield. The motto of the State, 'Here We Rest,' is on the scroll in its beak. To the left edge is '1819' and to the right edge is '1919.' The word 'Centennial' appears between. 'State of Alabama' is around the upper edge.

The first 5,000 of these coins show a St. Andrews Cross between two figure '2s,' the cross being emblematic of the State flag."⁴

"Hon. Thomas E. Kilby, the present Governor of Alabama, is privileged to see his portrait on a coin of the United States—a distinction that has not been enjoyed by any other citizen of this country at any time since the foundation of the United States. The Alabama Centennial Half Dollar, illustrated in this issue of *THE NUMISMATIST*, bears Governor Kilby's bust conjoined with that of Hon. William W. Bibb, who was Governor of the State in 1819, when Alabama was admitted to the Union, which event the half dollar commemorates.

While the coin is a commemorative issue and will not become part of our circulating medium, it is, like all other commemorative issues, an authorized coin of the United States and of full legal-tender quality.

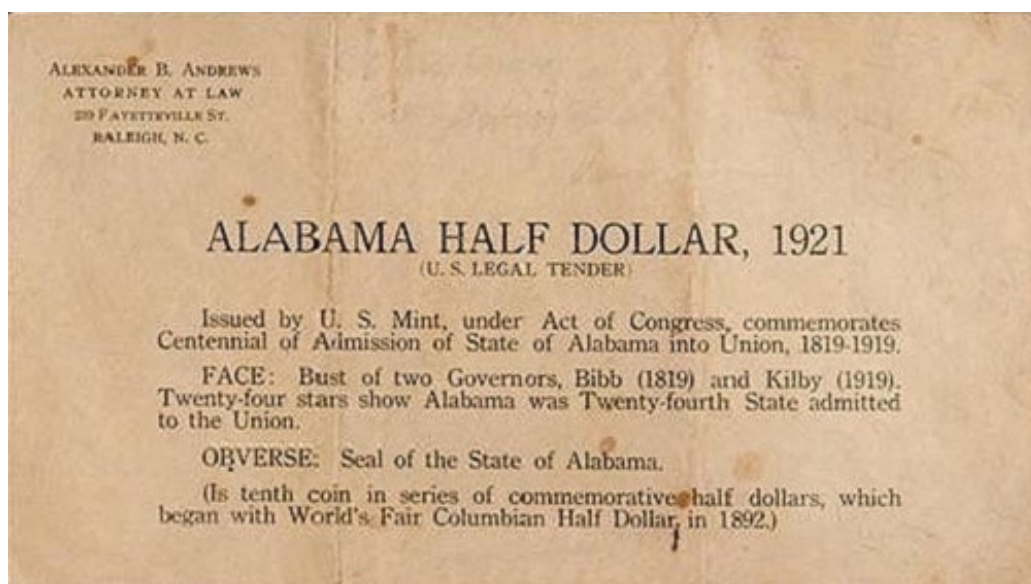
But few portraits of individuals have been placed on authorized coins of our Government, and in no other instance have they been so used until after the individual's death. Some of the pattern and experimental pieces issued in the 1780s and early 1790s carried the bust of Washington, and the Father of His country was privileged to look upon these during his lifetime. They were not authorized issues, however.

Until 1892 none of our coins had had on them the bust of any person. In that year came the Columbian Exposition Half Dollar with the bust of Columbus, and in the following year came another issue of the same coin, and the Columbian Exposition Quarter Dollar with the bust of Queen Isabella, dead of nearly four centuries at the time of issue. In 1900 came the Lafayette Dollar with the conjoined heads of Washington and Lafayette. Next was the Louisiana Purchase Exposition Gold Dollars, one bearing the bust of McKinley, dated 1803-1903, two years after his death, and one bearing the head of Jefferson of the same date.

⁴ *The Numismatist*, Editorial Comment-Numismatic News, The Alabama Centennial Half Dollar, January 1922, p. 16-17.



President Franklin D. Roosevelt. One in a collection of twenty-four different commemorative U.S. half dollars and one quarter dollar (MO 41.12.43.1-25), each mounted in a cardboard and cellophane container so that each side of the coin may be seen. Courtesy bequest of Franklin D. Roosevelt, FDR Library MO 1941-12-43-10.



Original card for the Alabama half dollar with full description of the coin and designs on the face. Image courtesy of Stacks Bowers Galleries.

Then came the Lewis and Clark Exposition (Portland, Ore.) Gold Dollars of 1904 and 1905, bearing the bust of Lewis on one side and Clark on the other side. In 1909 came the Lincoln cent with the bust of the Great Emancipator on the obverse—the only coin ever struck for general circulation bearing the bust of an American, living or dead. The McKinley Memorial Gold Dollars of 1916 and 1917 were the next issues, both bearing the bust of McKinley. Then came the Illinois Centennial Half Dollar with the bust of Lincoln, dated 1918, and quite recently the Missouri Half Dollar with the bust of Daniel Boone. The Alabama Centennial Half Dollar, with the busts of Kilby and Bibb, completes the list to date.

The fact that Miss Anna D. Williams of Philadelphia posed for the engraver of the Standard Silver Dollar of 1878 does not entitle her to the distinction of having her portrait on a United States coin. The head on that dollar is one typifying Liberty, and Miss Williams' features were considered particularly fitting for her to serve as a model for the engraver.

For the nickel first issued in 1913, Chief Iron Tail, a Sioux Indian, is said to have posed for Mr. Fraser while modeling the design for the obverse. The design must be considered as a typical Indian head, and not as a head of Chief Iron Tail. This belongs in the same class as the Standard Silver Dollar.

And on our new Peace Dollar of 1921, Mr. de Francisci says elsewhere in this issue, Mrs. De Francisci posed for him while modeling the typical head of Liberty for the coin, and he says it must be so considered, and not as a head of his wife.

We congratulate Governor Kilby. He has a unique distinction."⁵

"New research explains Alabama Centennial Half Dollar Mintage.

Until 1916, U.S. commemorative coins were issued to support large national exhibitions including the Columbian Exposition of 1892-93, Paris Exposition of 1900 (Lafayette Dollar), Louisiana Purchase Exposition (1903), Lewis and Clark Exposition (1904-05), and the Panama Pacific International Exhibition in 1915. But following Farran Zerbe's fiasco in distribution of the Panama Pacific International Exhibition commemorative coins of 1915, members of Congress and promoters of historical celebrations realized that the door was open for local profiteering from government-issued commemorative coins.

In 1916 and 1917 the McKinley Birthplace Memorial Commission sold gold dollar coins for \$3.00 to help finance a memorial at McKinley's hometown of Niles, Ohio. In 1918 came the first of the state centennial commemorative half dollars with profits going to the local organizing committee. Others jumped on the bandwagon including Maine and Plymouth Massachusetts in 1920, and Missouri in 1921.


The Alabama Centennial Commission, led by Mrs. Marie Bankhead Owen, having completed its centennial celebrations in 1919, saw little reason to exclude the state from the gravy train. Encouraged by Senator John H. Bankhead, (Sen. Bankhead died in March 1920, the same month as Mrs. Owen's husband. She was appointed to her husband's position in April.) Representatives William B. Bankhead, Lilius Rainey and others, Congress willingly passed a bill on May 10, 1920, authorizing up to 100,000 half dollars honoring Alabama's ex post facto centennial.

Appointed director of the Alabama Department of Archives and History on the death of her husband, Thomas M. Owen, in March 1920, Marie Owen ran both department and Centennial Commission according to her own rules. She was politically connected, socially admired and possessed the tenacity of a badger.

An early proposed design for the coin was rejected by the Commission of Fine Arts and it was not until June 1921 that new suggestions were made. Mrs. Owen's prosaic idea was to portray the state seal on the obverse, and portraits of governors William Bibb (1819) and Thomas Kilby (1919) on the reverse. (The designs should be credited to Mrs. Owen and the sculpting to Laura Fraser.) Owen offered an unusual comment about the state seal in a December 1921 letter to state banks.

Our first seal was a map showing the river courses of the State, the map being attached to an oak tree. During the Reconstruction period, the Legislature of 1868 changed this old great seal and attempted to fix upon us for all time the United States emblem, the American eagle. (NARA-P RG104, entry 658, box 119, 'Alabama Centennial half dollar.' Letter dated December 8, 1921 to [banks in Alabama] from Marie Bankhead Owen. p.2.)

In 1920 Anthony de Francisci was hired to sculpt the model for the Maine centennial half from designs stipulated by the Maine Centennial Commission. This time, in 1921, the Commission of Fine Arts asked Laura Gardin Fraser to prepare models for the Alabama half dollar. Laura's husband, James Earl Fraser, recommended adding a small special mark, '2X2,' to the original models. (See Flynn, pp. 253-254 and Taxay. p.47.) He felt this would encourage collectors to buy coins with and without the extra symbol.

This represents a red, -shaped cross of Saint Andrew as used on the Alabama state flag adopted in 1895. The plaster model had been made without the special mark, and mint engraver George Morgan manually cut 2X2 into the working hub, creating the incuse special mark for initial production.

⁵ *The Numismatist*, Editorial Comment-Numismatic News, Portraits on United States Coins, February, 1922, p. 80-81.

The design models were approved by Treasury Secretary Mellon on September 27 (NARA-CP RG104, entry 235, vol. 441, Letter dated September 30, 1921 to Rep. Lilius B. Rainey from Scoby.) and arrived at the Philadelphia Mint the following week. Acting mint director Mary O'Reilly advised Owen of the mint's work.

The superintendent of the Mint in Philadelphia has been requested to expedite as much as possible the execution of the coins and it is hoped a supply of the coins will be ready for delivery in time to reach Alabama prior to the visit of the President the latter part of October. (Ibid. Letter dated October 8, 1921 to Owen from O'Reilly.)



Fig. 1. Alabama Centennial half dollar as struck in October and December 22, 1921. (Courtesy Heritage Auctions).

Mrs. Owen wanted a large initial delivery before October 26, when President Harding was scheduled to visit Birmingham for dedication of a new Masonic temple. Laura Fraser's plaster models did not arrive at the Philadelphia Mint until October 6, 1921, and Owen directed a steady stream of telegrams and letters to mint director Frank Scoby and Philadelphia Mint Superintendent Freas Styer encouraging prompt production and delivery. Accordingly, the first 6,006 Alabama halves were struck on October 22. All were from dies with '2X2' on the portrait side. Four coins were reserved for the Annual Assay Commission and two for Special Assay.

Five thousand pieces were shipped to Mrs. Owen by express as soon as the state issued payment to the mint for the coins. (This was done with special permission of Governor Kilby since the Centennial Commission had finished its work the previous year.

The mint charged \$300 for the initial pair of dies.) They arrived just in time for the President's visit, and many were sold for \$1 each, although some were presented to dignitaries as complimentary souvenirs.

The First National Bank of Birmingham was allowed to have the initial order of these coins for use at the time of President Harding's visit to that city and on the occasion of Birmingham's semi-centennial celebration. No other bank in the State has, up to this time, received any of these historical and valuable coins. (NARA-P RG104, entry 658, box 119, 'Alabama Centennial half dollar.' Letter dated December 8, 1921 to [banks in Alabama] from Marie Bankhead Owen. p.1.)

By early December, sales in Birmingham had dwindled, and Owen came up with a new plan to sell coins. She would allocate the remaining approved mintage among all the banks in the state. Also, help from '...patriotic associations and club women throughout the entire State' would ensure '...we will have no difficulty in selling the last one of them.' (NARA-P RG104, entry 658, box 119, 'Alabama Centennial half dollar.' Letter dated December 7, 1921 to Styer from Owen.) She also asked the mint to '...proceed with the mintage of the entire authorized issue of coins.' (Ibid.) The mint took a wait-and-see approach, however.

The promotional letter mailed to all state and National banks in Alabama allowed each bank to buy a specified quantity based on the bank's assets. Each bank had to place its prepaid order with the Philadelphia Mint, pay for shipping and then sell the coins for \$1. The profit of 50-cents per coin was required to be paid to the Centennial Commission for 'monumental and historical purposes.' (Ibid, p.2.) Thus, banks and the mint did all the work and Owen's Commission took the profit. In addition to absence of any financial incentive to sell the coins, the Centennial Commission did not provide illustrated sales materials or coin holders.¹² Banks depended on their own resources to promote the coins.

Orders were relatively small – less than 100 coins per bank – and many banks did not bother to participate. Unfilled allocations meant that coins which might have been sold remained in mint vaults, while a few banks ran out of coins. Orders did not exceed coins remaining from October and were far short of totaling 100,000.

Within a week of opening distribution to banks Owen was getting requests for coins without the special '2X2' mark. On the 19th she telegraphed and wrote to Styer

Please stop striking 'two cross two' coins. The remainder should be without this special mark. I am receiving notices every day from our banks of orders being sent in to you, therefore I suggest that you continue the coinage until otherwise directed. (Op cit. RG104, entry 658, box 119. Letter dated December 19, 1921 to Styer from Owen.)

Superintendent Styer was now in an awkward situation. Owen wanted more coins struck, but she didn't want more with the special mark. But removing the special mark required making new dies, which could not be done instantly, and banks might order more coins than the 1,000 balance remaining from October. To solve the dilemma, Styer had more coins struck from the current dies, while preparing new dies without the special mark.

On December 22, the mint struck 10,008 Alabama halves with 2X2 in the portrait side field. Six were reserved for the Annual Assay Commission and 2 for Special Assay. The next day, with new dies ready, the mint struck 54,030 coins without the special mark. Reserved pieces included 28 for Annual Assay and 2 for Special Assay. Excluding assay coins, the Philadelphia Mint struck 16,000 Alabama Centennial half dollars with 2X2 and 54,000 without the special mark. (Op cit. RG104, entry 658, box 119. Manuscript table accompanying letter dated June 6, 1922 to Styer from W.C. Robertson, Asst. Cashier, First National Bank of Birmingham.) Bank orders continued to be filled from the October press run, and on January 24, 1922 Owen asked if all the coins had the special mark. (Possibly, she thought the banks had ordered many more coins than was the case. In reality, reminders from October had not been exhausted.)

I am having so many calls for the Alabama Centennial coin without the special mark, and it seems that none of the banks have that coin. I am writing directly to you to know if all the coins bear the special mark. Sometime ago you wired to know how many more to print with the special mark and I wired to mint no more of that variety but to go ahead without it. Please advise me what the situation is as soon as I heard from you I will send you an order for the unmarked coin. (Op cit. RG104, entry 658, box 119. Letter dated January 24, 1922 to Styer from Owen.)

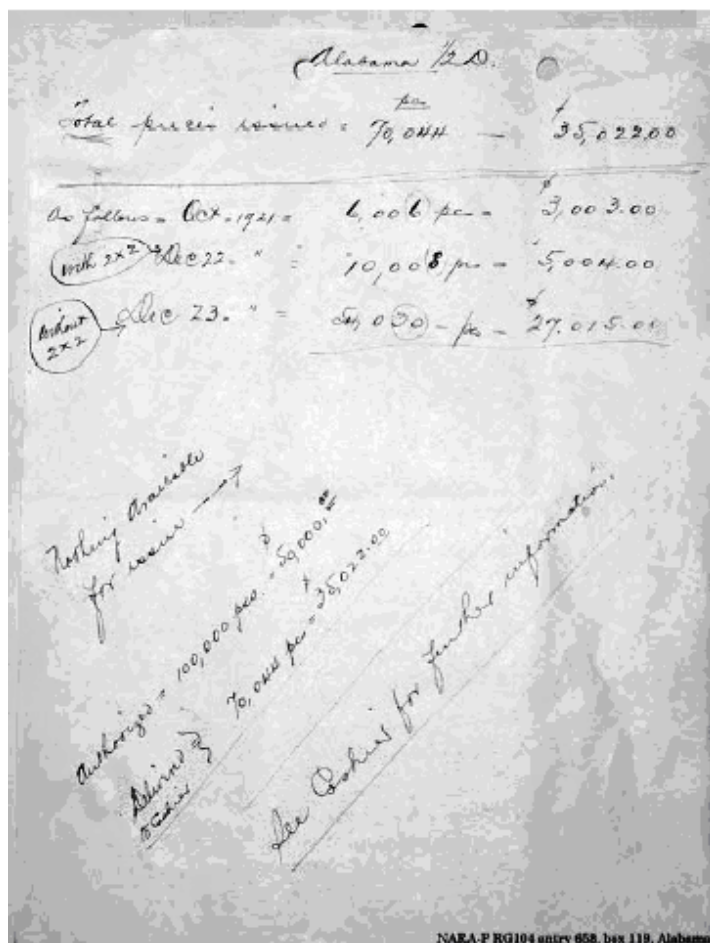
The letter includes an annotation evidently added by Styer or his secretary at the Philadelphia Mint: "5004 – 2X2; 27015 – without;" These are dollar amounts corresponding to 10,008 and 54,030 half dollars struck in December. Thus, it appears that by January 1922, less than 6,000 coins had been sold, and all of the December mintage remained in a mint vault.

By late April, Owen was anxious to have remaining coins in the hands of Alabama's citizens, and avoid the humiliation of having them melted. In a letter ordering another 200 coins (without 2X2) she wrote:

The Alabama Centennial Commission desires that these coins shall not be thrown back into the pot, but that they shall all be used in the State even if we have to have our bankers let them go at their face value. (Op cit. RG104, entry 658, box 119. Letter dated April 24, 1922 to Styer from Owen.)

By June 1922, approximately 52,400 halves, all without 2X2, remained at the mint. (With all of these presumably being plain issue, and most distributed at face value, the average condition of plain coins should be somewhat lower than coins with 2x2 on them.) A year later Owen gave up trying to sell the remaining coins for \$1 each. A letter to Styer from The First National Bank of Birmingham stated '...[Marie B. Owen] has been authorized by Gov. W.W. Brandon, to state to the Alabama banks that the Alabama Centennial Half Dollars may be distributed at their face value.' (Ibid. Letter dated June 15, 1923 to Styer from W.C. Robertson, Asst. Cashier, First National Bank of Birmingham.)

It appears that retail sales amounted to about 18,000 coins, almost all with 2X2 on them. Most of the plain coins were distributed at face value through the First National Bank of Birmingham and other Alabama banks.



National Archives and Records Administration, NARA-P RG104, entry 658, box 119, 'Alabama Centennial half dollar.' Letter dated December 7, 1921 to Styer from Owen.

Many were probably saved as curiosities and by owners of the 2X2 variety, but the majority likely saw normal use in commerce. Plain coins probably existed in roll quantities for many years. Five thousand Alabama Centennial halves were melted by the Philadelphia Mint between 1923 and early 1927, but the variety is unknown (NARA-CP RG104, entry 235, vol. 542. Letter dated February 10, 1927 to E. Titus Black, Scio, NY from O'Reilly).

It appears that retail sales amounted to about 18,000 coins, almost all with 2X2 on them. Most of the plain coins were distributed at face value through the First National Bank of Birmingham and other Alabama banks. Many were probably saved as curiosities and by owners of the 2X2 variety, but the majority likely saw normal use in commerce. Plain coins probably existed in roll quantities for many years. Five thousand Alabama Centennial halves were melted by the Philadelphia Mint between 1923 and early 1927, but the variety is unknown (NARA-CP RG104, entry 235, vol. 542. Letter dated February 10, 1927 to E. Titus Black, Scio, NY from

O'Reilly).

Alabama Centennial halves are frequently encountered in lower uncirculated and circulated conditions. The coins were widely distributed through banks at both a premium and face value, leading to most pieces being handled and circulated to some extent. Also, an absence of stable protective packaging resulted in above average incidental damage to the coins.

The 2X2 variety would be expected to survive in better overall condition since these constituted nearly all of the coins sold at a premium. Most plain coins were distributed at face value, but might have been preserved in roll quantities."⁸

Cornelius Vermeule writes: "The Alabama Centennial half dollar of 1921 and the Ulysses S. Grant Centenary half dollar and gold dollar of 1922 were the work of Laura Gardin Fraser (figs. 174 and 175). Born in 1889 in Chicago, she is remembered not only as a skillful medalist in her own right but as the wife of James Earle Fraser, discussed in connection with the Buffalo nickel of 1913. In 1925 she designed the Fort Vancouver Centennial half dollar, and the following year the Frasers, husband and wife, collaborated on the Oregon Trail Memorial fifty-cent piece, a coin struck intermittently until 1939 (figs. 183 and 186). As a maker of medals, Laura Gardin Fraser began her career in the shadow of her husband, doing such traditionally feminine subjects as a Better Babies medal in 1913, filled with the sentiment found in monuments in fashionable Episcopal churches of the pre-World War I era. She graduated early in the following decade to a very Renaissance, very Pisanello-like medal for the Irish Setter Club of America, with a most humanistic dog on the reverse.

⁸ With the permission of Roger Burdette. *Special for PCGS CoinFacts*, by Roger W. Burdette. Copyright 2010 by Roger W. Burdette. All rights reserved.

Her commemorative coins projected her firmly onto the national stage, and the culmination of a distinguished career was reached in 1958 when she executed the Centennial medal for the American Numismatic Society (fig. 196). Her commemorative coins projected her firmly onto the national stage, and the culmination of a distinguished career was reached in 1958 when she executed the Centennial medal for the American Numismatic Society (fig. 196).

The coin celebrating Alabama's century in the union (including the years spent as a Confederate state) is a good example of the trite motifs, partly real and partly symbolic, that go into one of these statehood commemorations (fig. 174). The organization of the portraits, stars and lettering on the obverse is again that of the Renaissance medal,⁶ and the reverse, said to present the Great Seal of Alabama, resembles the reverse of the Illinois Centennial half dollar of 1918, also based on the arms of the state.

This creates a kind of triple flavor: the Renaissance, the seal and die engraving of the period 1810 to 1870 (especially the decade of the 1870s), and the numismatic art of the 1920s. The jugate busts, one of the then governor and the other of his first predecessor, recall that this classical device was revived in American coinage on the Washington-Lafayette silver dollar of 1900. Fraser was required to exhibit only the religious motto, and the remaining epigraphy is reasonably minimal. Vigorous lettering has saved uninteresting portraits from weakening the obverse, and the defiant eagle of the reverse is handled in a spirit worthy of Saint-Gaudens or the best patterns for silver of the national centennial era. . ."⁹



Marie Bankhead Owen, circa 1885.

Marie Bankhead Owen Bio: "Marie Bankhead Owen (1869-1958) served for 35 years as director of the Alabama Department of Archives and History (ADAH) and was only the second woman to head a state agency. Owen was an accomplished author and wrote numerous columns, books, and articles. She was also active in civic groups and was a vocal opponent of woman suffrage and civil rights. She came from a distinguished and nationally prominent Alabama family and was married to Thomas McAdory Owen, the first director of ADAH.

Marie Bankhead was born on September 1, 1869, in Noxubee County, Mississippi, on the old Bankhead plantation, the daughter of future Alabama congressman and Senator John H. Bankhead and Tallulah J. Brockman Bankhead, both established residents of Alabama. Marie had three younger brothers: John H. Bankhead Jr., who served in the U.S. Senate; William B. Bankhead, who served as Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives; and Henry M. Bankhead, an army officer. She attended Ward's Seminary, a finishing school in Nashville, Tennessee, which trained girls from elite families in cultural and social subjects. After graduation, she spent the winter in Washington, D.C., with her father, traveled to Europe, and rejoined her family in Alabama. In 1887, Marie met her future husband Thomas M. Owen, the oldest of nine children of a physician, at the University of Alabama commencement in Tuscaloosa, where he graduated with high honors receiving his A.B. degree. Despite her family's reservations about Thomas Owens's inferior financial status, the two wed on April 12, 1893. They had two sons, Thomas McAdory Owen Jr. in 1894, and John Hollis Bankhead Owen in 1895, who died at the age of five.

Affectionately known as 'Miss Marie,' Owen viewed ADAH's role as promoter of the state's cultural values rather than simply a repository of its history. The archives itself served as an archives, museum, and library, and she worked to develop a traveling library system. In her role as director, she served extensively on boards and commissions, such as the Confederate Pension Board, Alabama Centennial Commission, Alabama Memorial World War Commission, Capitol Building Commission, State Park Commission, Memorial Building Commission, and the Fine Arts Commission, to name just a few. She continued to make public speeches throughout her life.

6. Here I differ from Taxay (*Commemorative Coinage*, 43-47), who asserts that the eagle seal is the obverse and the jugate bust the reverse.

⁹ *Numismatic Art in America; Aesthetics of the United States Coinage*, 2nd edition, Cornelius Vermeule, Whitman Publishing, LLC, 2007, p. 152-153.

She acted as a writer, historian, civic worker, and public servant. Influenced by the white southern values of her time, she advocated for Alabama, though not for all Alabamians. Owen retired as director in 1955 and died on March 2, 1958, at the Dunn Rest Home in Selma. Marie Bankhead Owen was inducted into the Alabama Women's Hall of Fame in 1975, and the ADAH stands as a lasting testament to the legacy of Marie Bankhead Owen."¹⁰



Laura Gardin Fraser.

Laura Gardin Fraser Bio: "Born in Chicago, the daughter of Emil and Alice (Tilton) Gardin, on September 14, 1889, Laura Gardin was educated in public schools in Rye, New York and at the Horace Mann School in New York City. She began her study of sculpture at the age of 18 with James Earle Fraser (whom she later married on November 17, 1913; see biography above) at the Art Students League in New York City. During World War I she served as captain of the ambulance division of the Motor Corps of America.

She became well known for her studies of wildlife, for her portrait sculpture, and as a medalist. Laura Gardin Fraser was awarded the Saltus medal (for outstanding work in medallic art) by the American Numismatic society in 1926, and was the recipient of numerous honors given by the National Academy of Design. Her bust of Gilbert Stuart is in the Hall of Fame. She created a number of large sculptures including an equestrian statue in Baltimore, the *Grape Baby* fountain (Rose Garden, Delaware Park, Buffalo, New York), and a work displayed at Brookgreen Gardens (south Carolina).

Among her many medallic works was the congressional medal of honor of Charles A. Lindbergh's transatlantic flight in 1927. With her husband (who predeceased her by 12 years) she maintained a studio in Westport, Connecticut. Mrs. Fraser's final work was the fulfillment of a commission for three large bronze panels for the library at the West Point Military Academy. Her death occurred in Norwalk, Connecticut on August 13, 1966. She was survived by two sisters.

Commemorative credits: 1921 Alabama Centennial half dollar, 1922 Grant Memorial gold dollar, 1925 Vancouver Centennial half dollar (she revised designs created by Sidney Bell), 1926-1939 Oregon Trail half dollar (with James Earle Fraser).¹¹

¹⁰ Encyclopedia of Alabama.

¹¹ *Commemorative Coins of the United States; A Complete Encyclopedia*, Q. David Bowers, published by Bowers and Merena Galleries, Inc., Wolfeboro, NH, 1991, p. 706-707.

Congressional Authorization Act:

[PUBLIC—NO. 200—66TH CONGRESS.]

[H. R. 12824.]

CHAP. 177.—An Act To authorize the coinage of 50-cent pieces in commemoration of the one hundredth anniversary of the admission of the State of Alabama into the Union.

May 10, 1920.

[H. R. 12824.]

[Public, No. 200.]

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That as soon as practicable, and in commemoration of the one hundredth anniversary of the admission of the State of Alabama into the Union as a State, there shall be coined at the mints of the United States silver 50-cent pieces to the number of one hundred thousand, such 50-cent pieces to be of the standard troy weight, composition, diameter, device, and design as shall be fixed by the Director of the Mint, with the approval of the Secretary of the Treasury, and said 50-cent pieces shall be legal tender in any payment to the amount of their face value.

Alabama centennial.
Silver 50-cent pieces
to be coined in commemoration of.

Number.

Legal tender.

Coinage laws applicable.

SEC. 2. That all laws now in force relating to the subsidiary silver coins of the United States and the coining or striking of the same, regulating and guarding the process of coinage, providing for the purchase of material, and for the transportation, distribution, and redemption of the coins, for the prevention of debasement or counterfeiting, for security of the coin, or for any other purpose, whether said laws are penal or otherwise, shall, so far as applicable, apply to the coinage herein authorized: *Provided*, That the Government shall not be subject to the expense of making the necessary dies and other preparations for this coinage.

Proviso.
No expense for dies,
etc.

Approved, May 10, 1920.